

**I have a question for you: Are you really a disciple of Jesus or do you worship an alien God?**

**Before you give a simple answer to that question let me give you an example of how we can be tempted to believe in a god who is quite alien from the one we find in the gospels. You may know who Joel Osteen, a famous televangelist whose ministry is centered out of Houston. He was heavily criticized this past week for not immediately taking in flood victims from Houston into his large church building.**

**Now just think about this for a moment: thousands of people coming into his beautiful building,**

- **all their clothes wet,**
- **having walked through filthy water,**
- **hungry, with no change of clothes, food, or medication,**
- **not knowing how long they would be staying.**

**Would WE be open to having flood victims fill OUR church?**

**The question challenges the very core of our faith? It forces us to ask ourselves, “What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?”.**

Well, in today's gospel, Jesus confronts one of the first disciples, Peter with a similar question. What does Peter actually believe that Jesus stands for?

- In the verses before this passage, Peter is the first disciple to publicly proclaim that Jesus is the Christ is the Son of the living God.
  - Peter had heard Jesus' proclaiming about Kingdom of God
  - He had heard Jesus' preaching that ALL are welcome.
  - He had seen Jesus' mercy and healing power on display;
    - he has healed the lame, the deaf and dumb; he forgave sins.

Yes, Peter says, Jesus is truly the Son of God.

But now Jesus says that he must suffer, die and on the third day be raised. Peter cannot accept that. "God forbid. Nothing like that should happen to you!" Surely, you don't mean it, master! Surely you do not mean it! I am not sure I can follow you if being your disciple means suffering, dying and being raised.

Jesus response is quick and pointed. "Get behind me, Satan. You are not thinking as God does, but as human beings do." And then to make it crystal clear Jesus says, "Whoever wishes to come after me must

**deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.” While being a disciple of Christ surely does mean helping to bring about the Kingdom of God, a kingdom to which ALL are invited and in which His mercy is abundant, it also includes taking up our cross daily and following Jesus through suffering, death and resurrection.**

**To be a disciple of Jesus one must embrace the whole of what Jesus said and did. But our world tempts us to choose other ways, easier ways, to the fullness of life. In today’s second reading from letter to the Romans we are challenged by the words, “Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your minds.” As disciples of Christ, our minds must be like the mind of Christ.**

**And so I come back to the basic question:**

- Whether you are a youngster just returning to school,**
- Or a teen who is questioning who you are and who your parents are, or which friends you should hang out with or who exactly is God for you,**
- Or whether you are a young adult trying to get settled in an occupation or a relationship,**

- Or whether you are an adult who has taken on the responsibilities of a household and all who live with you, I ask you, “What is your understanding of the heart and mind of Christ? As a disciple of Christ how is the Lord asking you to live? Be careful of what kind of Christ you follow. Remember, Peter in today’s gospel thought he knew EXACTLY who Jesus was.

**(PAUSE)**

One very popular version of being a disciple of Christ in our world today is something called the Prosperity Gospel. It is very popular in the United States and is being spread in Africa and in Central and South America. It goes like this. If you want to be prosperous and rich, (and who does not want to be prosperous and rich) just follow Jesus. Tithe to your church and God will give you abundantly blessings. You will receive all that you need.

Now while this may be a simplified version of the Prosperity Gospel, it has attracted millions of followers from three continents of the world. But the Prosperity Gospel often ignores the challenge of Christ’s words today: to be a follower of Christ we must be willing to suffer, die and be raised up.

**The Prosperity Gospel communities may have good music, well-crafted sermons and entertaining services, but you will hear little of suffering, dying and being raised up.**

**In the Catholic Church we are tempted with our own version of the Prosperity gospel. We are tempted to move to the safest communities, have the nicest homes we can afford, and to sit back glued to our TV sets and computers. "Please do not disturb" signs could easily be placed on our front lawns.**

**But deep down within our spiritual blood streams we lift up and honor people who identify with those who suffer, die and rise, people like Mother Theresa and Pope Francis. We see them offering their lives as disciples of Christ, suffering and dying, believing that they will be raised up.**

**When Mother Theresa visited Detroit many years ago, a suburban mother came up to her and asked what she could do to help her. Mother Theresa answered, go home and love your family. Oh yes, being a disciple of Jesus means proclaiming the kingdom of God is in our midst, --- in our home, our school, our neighborhoods and our places of work. Jesus' kingdom is one for ALL people, a kingdom of justice and peace and of love. But being a disciple also means being willing to suffer and die with Christ trusting that His Father will raise us up with him.**

**I end this reflection with the same question Jesus asked Peter, “Who do you say that I am?” Please answer it not in words but with actions in your daily life.**